

businesses are the ones that are hit the hardest.

Many of them are operating on a very narrow margin already. They have had to cut benefits and, in many cases, eliminate coverage altogether for their employees. Some of them have been forced to lay off workers because of the cost of health care. They simply can't sustain it; it eats into their profits and they can't stay in business. So it is no wonder that small businesses across America have said to us and have made it known that access to affordable health care is their No. 1 concern: access to affordable health care.

That is what this small business health insurance debate is all about. It is the guts, the thrust of the bill on the floor today. Small business owners want to take care of their employees and their families. They want to do everything they possibly can. Most small businesses are family affiliated, many of them family run, but it is becoming impossible to do in the face of increases that are so far greater than any margins they have, these double-digit increases in health insurance every year.

One survey reports that only 41 percent of firms with 9 employees or less can afford to offer health benefits, compared to 99 percent of large firms. That hurts the ability of small businesses to attract capable workers, to stay in business, to stay competitive in the larger marketplace. Unfortunately, the system is broken and small businesses are caught. They are stuck.

Eighteen hundred State mandates are choking the ability of the private sector to offer affordable choices, reasonable choices. We have to cut out the redtape. We have to streamline the process itself. We have to get rid of the waste and abuse in the system.

We all know that small businesses are the engine of economic growth in our economy. These small businesses are where innovation occurs and these innovators create 60 to 80 percent of all new jobs nationwide. They generate more than 50 percent of the gross domestic product. In my home State of Tennessee, 97 percent of all businesses are small businesses. This aspect of affordable health care is their No. 1 concern.

It makes sense that if we want to expand health care coverage, if we want to diminish the number of uninsured, we need to start to at least make a major advance in an area where we know we can make a difference, and that is where the jobs are. That is why the Enzi-Nelson-Burns small business health insurance bill that we bring to the floor and will formally open debate on here in about an hour is so important.

I want to applaud Chairman ENZI for his tremendous work to pull people together on both sides of the aisle to address these issues. This bill represents the first real, major, solid step to end the small business health plan stalemate that has characterized this body

in over a decade. Its purpose is to deliver meaningful reform for millions of Americans employed in the small business sector.

Under this plan, small business firms would be able to combine their negotiating power and to group that negotiating power in a way that purchasing clout can be used to purchase more affordable plans. By allowing that to happen, they could reduce the cost of health insurance by as much as \$1,000 per employee, while reducing the number of uninsured, people who are uninsured today, by more than 1 million. The CBO recently estimated the Enzi-Nelson-Burns plan would increase Federal revenue by \$3.3 billion between 2007 and 2016, while saving States an estimated \$600 million in Medicaid spending during the same period.

I know this is a very important bill. I am delighted that we will begin on this bill in an hour, or a little over an hour from now. It will be a substantive debate and will go right to the heart of a major problem facing this country, and that is the uninsured. It will address the issues of cost, access, and quality. I encourage Members on both sides of the aisle to participate in this debate, to stay on the issues—we are talking about small business health reform—to not bring in extraneous issues, and with that pass a very important and substantive bill for the American people.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the problem with the Enzi bill is laid out in great detail in a report filed by the minority of the HELP Committee. This is not a question of my not liking the bill, it is not a question of Democrats versus Republicans, it is a question of the bill not being good. It is not a good bill, as indicated by 41 attorneys general. Forty-one attorneys general have signed letters saying the Enzi bill is not good for their States. These attorneys general are from Democratic States and Republican States. Insurance commissioners from around the country have acknowledged that the bill is not a good bill. The bill is opposed by 206 different advocacy groups and health care organizations, disability groups, and professional organizations.

For example, we know that the American Association of Retired People opposes this legislation. I was able to speak to Mr. Novelli a couple of times about this bill while it was moving through the system, and AARP believes the bill is very hurtful to senior citizens, as well as the Small Business Majority, the National Health Council, and the Lance Armstrong Foundation. As I said, more than 200 different orga-

nizations think this legislation is bad for the American people.

I have been led to believe that when this bill is brought to the floor, the 30 hours doesn't expire postcloture on the motion to proceed until sometime this afternoon. We have agreed to go to the bill at an earlier time. But it is not going to give the people in our country the opportunity to move forward on progressive, strong legislation. We will be stuck with the Enzi bill, and AARP doesn't think it is going to go anywhere. The amendments will be controlled by Senator ENZI. If he likes the amendment, he will allow us to offer it. If he doesn't, he won't. I submit that is not the way we should move forward on legislation brought forward during Health Care Week dealing with health care reform.

There are many issues related to health care we need to deal with. There are issues that are so fundamental to what is going on in the country today, and we believe the proposal put forward by Senator LINCOLN from Arkansas, the ranking member of the Finance Committee, Senator BAUCUS, and of course a person who has worked very hard on this legislation for months, Senator DURBIN, should be the legislation we debate. But it will not be. We should have the opportunity to offer amendments relating to postponing the May 15 cutoff line of the eligibility for Medicare drug benefits. That is not going to be allowed.

We should be able to offer legislation dealing with the ability of Medicare to be competitive and bid for drugs at a lower price. That won't be able to be offered.

We should be able to offer an amendment dealing with stem cell research, giving hope to millions of Americans. We won't be able to do that. That is unfortunate.

Walking into the Chamber today, I was asked by someone: Tell us what you stand for. I think, rather than what I stand for, what we stand for as a minority, it is who we stand for. I think that is the direction we should be focusing: Who do we stand for?

There are lots of people we stand for. We stand for parents with no health care. We stand for those people with maladies who are crying out for some research on stem cells so we can move forward finding cures for these diseases—Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, diabetes.

We stand for children who are attending failing schools because the Bush administration refuses to put money into the schools that needs it. It is reported today that very soon there will be 10,000 schools in America that will be failing. I don't think that speaks well. Why are they failing? It is because of this Leave No Child Behind Act that the President pushed so hard.

We stand for the soccer mom who, today, someplace, is going to fill up her vehicle with gasoline and find the price is prohibitive. Rather than filling up her tank, she will fill it half full,